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ECHO

Secondhand smoke exposure remains a risk in Massachusetts restaurants despite widespread adoption of smoking regulations

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A survey of restaurant smoking regulations in the 351 towns and cities in Massachusetts found that 82% of adults and 82% of youths are not guaranteed protection from secondhand smoke in restaurants in their town of residence. The same proportion of restaurant workers and 87% of bar workers are similarly not protected.

The survey looked at the smoking regulations from each town relating to customers and employees and classified them into eight categories according to whether there were no restrictions in place, limited restrictions (such as smoking only in separate ventilated areas or bar areas) or a complete ban on smoking. The proportion of the population in each town covered by the regulations was estimated from census data. The number of bar and restaurant staff was estimated to be proportional to the town population.

Although 225 towns had adopted some type of smoking regulation only 60 (covering 17.7% of the population) completely banned smoking in restaurants. The remainder restricted smoking in some way—174 of these to bar areas or separately ventilated areas, although 35 of these still allowed for variation to the regulations.

This study shows that classifying some restaurants and bars as ''smoke free'' may be misleading, and argues that there may be customers, and especially restaurant and bar staff, who are still exposed to cigarette smoke. It also calls for public health workers to tighten up their implementation of smoking regulations.

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